

The Indian Bride

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The Indian Bride

(A WAR LEGEND)

BY

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DEDICATED TO OUR
CANADIAN SOLDIERS

THE INDIAN BRIDE.

I.

To heedless crowds, Reverence, with lifted hand,
Oft telleth where some genius first saw light,
Or by a broken altar bids them stand
Where long ago Devotion's fires shone bright,
Or shows them where, contending for the right,
Brave Liberty once won a hard fought day —
Then weeps that honored names should vanish quite,
That glorious deeds provoked no simple lay,
That dull utility should sweep landmarks away.

II.

Two spots I know — legend and story fraught,
Like old world ruins where the mosses cling,
Where long ago were bloody battles fought,
But where to-day Peace rests on downy wing;
And oft in autumn of the year, or spring,
Within his furrows, musing, stands the swain,
And long surveys some new-discovered thing,
His share unearths upon the quiet plain,
Until forgotten times it doth revive again.

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III.

These scenes between, thrice fifty years ago,
Seven leagues of deep, unbroken forest lay,
With nought else but the rude-blazed trees to show
The anxious traveller how to find his way.
But you who journey there at this late day —
The well-spanned stream that once gore-dyed did run,
The happy children on those knolls at play,
Bid them reveal what thereabout was done,
Beside the self-same road, beneath the self-same sun.

IV.

Those were the days — now happily long past —
When Discord's fiery torch such havoc wrought,
When on this western plain a die was cast,
And two great peoples for a kingdom fought,
When Peace ofttimes in vain a respite sought,
When feathered savages in ambush lay,
Till every heart was with dire dread distraught,
For treachery did these wood-dwellers sway,
While fell distrust the wheels of progress fain would stay.

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V.

Then o'er Fort Cumberland and Baie-de-Verte
The victor flag of Britain floated high,
And Golden-Lily bearers, honor-hurt,
As ousted knights in lists, resolved to try
A lance again with Fate — to win or die!
While as spectators of this mortal feud
The treacherous Indians did in ambush lie,
Whose sympathy the work of Peace withstood,
As do the veering winds the sail that takes the flood.

VI.

A name survives even cold Oblivion,
A lonestar while the rest have taken flight;
He, that the subtle Indians might be won
To Albion's side, an embassy at night,
Was sent — so pliant-tongued, and fair, and bright,
And he oft-times of merry England told —
Of meads and wolds with primroses bedight,
Of his loved isle round which the ocean rolled,
Of fields of deathless fame in stirring days of old.

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VII.

When in mid-heaven Diana hung her lamp,
One autumn night, his country's suit to plead,
He bent his steps unto the Indians' camp;
And as unto his story they gave heed,
One comely maid he spied who seemed to feed
Her soul upon his word — her hair coal-jet;
A blanket, vermeil-dyed, by many a bead
Inwrought, about her slender shoulders met —
A face nor sleep nor absence could make him forget.

VIII.

But to a painted, warlike Indian chief,
Whose eyes were homes of Hate's undying flame,
Withered and bent with age — this story's grief!
There was betrothed this youthful, bright-eyed dame,
And Ah! mercy, she would have borne his name
Had Fate ne'er brought this soldier to her side,
Who henceforth had but one absorbing aim —
To make this pretty Indian girl his bride,
And in Romance's grave inter his English pride.

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IX.

Though of the eye of Scorn he well was ware,—
His family tree was one of ancient date;
Though Peace and Caution both bade him beware
Lest that disturbing deed he expiate,
Should he awake the slumbering Indian hate,
He recked not (Love is deaf as well as blind!)
He taught her English speech; one evening late
He told her plain what long was in his mind —
She answered then: “For you I’ll leave all else behind.”

X.

At length when they oft secretly had met,
And silent night the only one who knew —
Night with such secrets fraught — the time was set
For them to seal their vows. Away they flew!
The shining stars for a brief space withdrew,
As though to screen them; then the parson’s light,
The haven of their hopes, appeared in view,
The words are said that have such magic might,
And the new-wedded pair step out into the night.

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XI.

Ah! what to-night will o'er them shelter hold?—

To Cumberland their fear-winged feet repair,
Where by the cautious captain they are told
All are unsafe if they be harboured there;
For who the incensed Indians would dare?

Then he bethinks that evil may betide
Them shelterless out in the fate-charged air,
And orders that the gates be opened wide,—
And soon they shut within the soldier and his bride.

XII.

Six hundred men in Cumberland beset

Him with the stinging taunt, "Ah! can it be
That you your English home could so forget?

Or so provoke the Indian's enmity?"

He blushed and bravely bore it all, and she,

A pretty flower among the thorns appeared,
Few other wives to bear her company,

She nimbly wrought, the stricken ones she cheered
And made Pain's pillow smooth — and thus herself endeared.

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XIII.

But other work was soon to beckon her;

To Cumberland swift rumor made its way,
And told a tale that set all hearts astir —

'Twas that at Baie-de-Verte, the morrow-day,
Infuriated Indians would waylay

The garrison unware, in search of wood —
Like a town emptied on a holiday;

The import of this threat all understood,
The tomahawk would sate itself with English blood!

XIV.

'Twas nightfall when this message made its round,
And when Aurora oped the gates of day,
O'er the wood tangled isthmus would be bound

Two hundred men. "But why till then delay,
Yon moon is bright!" thus did the captain say,

And to the new-wed Englishman he hies;
"Your Indian bride knows well the red-man's way,

Ah! she may be God's blessing in disguise,
With her you can be there 'gainst morn doth gild the skies."

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XV.

The soldier's cheeks with anger were aflush

Then these words uttered with emotion deep:

"To-night to bear your order I shall rush

Through the deep wood — while care-forgetting sleep
The doors of her chaste mind shall safely keep.

Would you send her — so young, so delicate,
To brave the night? Or furtive things that leap

O'er the deep moss? Or her own people's hate?
Let her bide here secure, while I your bidding wait!"

XVI.

And then they heard soft footsteps stealing near,
And words as sweet as any canticle:

"Love, let us go! — an Indian knows no fear,

I know each brook and hill and fern-lined dell,
The captain's words of warning we shall tell,

I'll lead you to the shore where waves as blue
As are your eyes in great sea-anthem's swell!"

Ere these words on the night air died, the two
Took the fir-shaded path, and disappeared from view.

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XVII.

She led his steps while that long night held sway,
To which the silver moon a splendour gave,
As on they moved neither had much to say,
That errand, danger-fraught, had made them grave;
But Love has power from out Fear's thrall to save,
He watched with pride her lithe and swaying form,
Ah! here, he thought, was one whom wind and wave,
And spaces vast — silence as well as storm —
Had left their trace upon, Ah! here was Nature's norm!

XVIII.

And as Aurora left Tithonus' bed,
All decked in saffron robes, and o'er the sea
That then appeared, her wondrous glory shed,
And high above, in every dew-wet tree
The birds, just waked, all sang melodiously —
Song that denied that hate was anywhere,
There snapped a twig! Again! What might it be?
Some home-bound beast that sought its cub-filled lair —
So on that fated morn thought this fleet-footed pair.

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XIX.

Then there emerged the rising mounds of war,
And as an anchored sailor will confide
In one who led him past the harbor bar,
So he: "You'll lead me now whate'er betide!"
Then his strong arm through hers did softly slide,
When lo! there loomed a form, repulsive, swart,
Then flashed a blade in morn sheen dyed — his bride
Fell at his feet — the steel had found her heart!
Her spirit screamed as loth from that fair shrine to part.

XX.

As long ago, behind the walls of Troy,
Cries from outside did bring the inmates pain,
A-telling how Death did himself employ,
So this cry told a tale of some one slain,
And from the fort rushed men to ascertain
What crime the morning innocence had dyed,
But oh! that sateless blade was drunk again
With human gore and he fell by her side,
While o'er the dewy grass there flowed a purple tide.

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XXI.

The Indians to the virgin forest flew —

Lost as the deadly snake that bites and flies
Into the thicket straight is lost to view.

Aid came too late; no power beneath the skies
Could make that wan, death-smitten man arise;

With gentle hands they lift his wife new-dead,
That he might see her with his closing eyes;

They stood around each with uncovered head,
And to a milder day pass on what then he said:

XXII.

“All night we hurried, for fear urged us on,
And vetoed speech. We came to kill the plot
That Hate hatched hereabout, and it is done!

Now they shall know that love of her did not
Usurp me so that Duty was forgot,

And when the fields of Peace others shall reap,
Let them remember all was dearly bought;

I ask but this — here by the tossing deep,
So dear to English hearts, let us together sleep.”

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XXIII.

By Baie-de-Verte Affection dug their graves,
Where year by year a deeper green has grown,
Where day by day the violet-lipped waves
Have blent their voices in a dirge-like moan,
Where fair Romance has often come alone
And mid the mounds with reverence has stept;
Where Fancy, too, has leaned against a stone,
And on their graves a tear for pity wept,
And thought of those who there thrice fifty years have slept.

XXIV.

And 'tis averred by some that till this day,
Ere Dark on ebon wings has taken flight,
Ere morning gilds the blue floors of the bay,
With Fancy they have seen a wondrous sight,
A pair of lovers clad in robes of light,
Stand on the margin of that quiet shore,
Like strange and speechless pilgrims of the night;
But when upon the threshold of the door
A new-born day appears, they can be seen no more!



